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INDEX HEADINGS.

Pers. C.
Reports.
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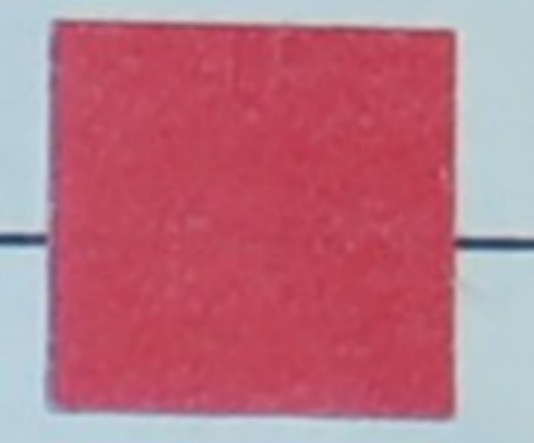
FOR CIRCULATION—

Registry P.110 23/5
Mr.
Mrs. Mortimer 24/5
Mr. MacLeod
Mr.
Mr. Wiseman 2/7
Mr.
Mr. Dixon
Mr. Machtig
Sir H. Batterbee
Perm. U.S. of S.
Parly. U.S. of S.
Secretary of State

From

Date

INDIANS IN THE DOMINIONS



Report on Race Problems by
British Commonwealth Relations Conference
Recorder, by Major M. S. COMAY

FOR ACTION:—

Mr.
Conf. Clerks
Copying Dept.
Despatch Section
Registry

Connected Papers



MINUTES.

Printing Instructions

1 Chatham Hse. — (Encl. & letter
regd. on C.263/3) — 23.3.45.
2 (Regd. vide Sir C. Dixon's min. of 6/4/45 on C.263/3).

? Put by.

S.M.O.

24/5

You may refer to Sir Chris Chatham House paper
which deals, inter alia, with the position of
Indians in S. Africa, Canada, Australia etc.
The comments by the Indian and S. African
Delegates is on pages 2 & 3. and contains
a suggestion by an Indian Delegate that
there should be some "international machinery"
to arbitrate on contentious issues such as
those facing the Union Govt. in Natal.

I understand that a Canadian Delegate
thought that the franchise "might" be
granted to Indians in B.C. Columbia.

We have, of course, no official estimate of
that whatever.

? Put by

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at our Row

2/7/45.

Regd. on C.263/3.
Encl. & letter fr. Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham Hse.,
dated 23/3/45.

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PRELIMINARY DRAFT

CONFIDENTIAL

G.24/85/p.1

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE ON RACE PROBLEMS

RECORDER'S REPORT BY MAJOR M.S. COMAY

I. Wider Backgrounds

This Session concerned itself mainly with the position of
Indians in other parts of the Commonwealth, but at bottom it
raised the whole issue of racial equality. To quote a pre-
paratory paper drawn up by a Chatham House Study Group:
"Hitherto the Commonwealth has been composed of self-governing
nations of the white races, but in future it will comprise
also self-governing nations of colour. This will have an
important bearing on the various outlooks of the existing
member nations, who will then have to accustom themselves to
new ways of thinking, and to a fresh conception of the
British family of nations."

But it is more than a Commonwealth matter. Indeed, the
main paper submitted by the Canadian delegation regards it as
easily the most difficult post-war problem facing the United
Nations, and the most perilous to the future peace of the
world. It utters a warning that, unless this is solved,
"The Chinese, the Japanese, the Indians - all the nation
states composed of non-whites - sooner or later will make
common cause against the self-chosen superior whites."

During the discussion a United Kingdom delegate also
stressed the world-wide significance of this question, and
instanced the negroes in the United States, and the discrimi-
nation of caste and race in India herself.

Implicit throughout the discussion, though not clearly
stated, there was a fundamental reaction shared by all four
Dominions. In all there was the same powerful impulse to
preserve their identity as white groups, and the high standard
of living they enjoyed. But here an important distinction
had to be noted: in Australia, New Zealand and Canada, this
impulse manifested itself externally - in the refusal to con-
sider an influx from more densely populated regions,
especially in Asia; in South Africa the same impulse mani-
fested itself internally in the refusal to grant equal status
and opportunity to the coloured peoples, who made up four-
fifths of her population.

Some of the specific issues raised in this Session, and
in that on Colonial Policy, can only be seen in proper
perspective if they are regarded not merely as local problems,
but are posed against this Commonwealth and world background.

II. Indian Disabilities in South Africa

Delegates from India made clear that that country would
regard as her concern any discrimination against Indians
elsewhere, and that her resentment on this score had become
focussed mainly on South Africa.

1 Chatham Hse. - (Encl. & letter
regd. on C263/3) 23. 3. 45.
2
(Regd. vide Sir C. Dixon's min. of 6/4/45 on C. 263/3)

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at our Row
2/7/45.

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Regd. on C 263/3.
Encl. & letter fr. Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham Hse.,
dated 23/3/45. 3

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The main Indian spokesman reminded the Conference that the Indians had originally been introduced into Natal, from 1860 onwards, at the instance of the white sugar planters there. To-day there was a community numbering 220,000, which was suffering severe disabilities. It had been deprived of both parliamentary and municipal franchise, was discriminated against in trading, land purchase, education, housing and social services, and had to accept humiliating social restrictions. He stated that the arguments usually advanced to justify this system could be answered as follows: (a) The restoration of franchise need not imply granting it to Africans as well, for the Indians in South Africa had already had it and India herself was attaining self-government. The principle of "No taxation without representation" had been flouted. The fear of the Europeans in Natal that they would be swamped by the Indian vote could be met by raising the inter-provincial barriers. (b) There was no danger of miscegenation, as experience in India and Ceylon would bear out. In any event this argument contradicted the reproach that the Indians were unassimilable. (c) As regards economic competition, the low standards of living were simply perpetuated by restrictions, while hoarding was the result of insecurity.

He demanded the restoration of the franchise, the removal of provincial barriers and the full implementation of the Cape Town Agreement of 1927, in which a pledge had been given that South African Indians would be enabled to conform to western standards.

He admitted that some progress had been made since 1927, but declared that feeling ran high in India, which was not prepared to accept counsels of patience any longer. She would take this question up strongly when she obtained self-government, and it would affect her attitude towards membership of the Commonwealth. Indians had noted the absence of colour-bar in French Colonial Policy, and the abolition of race and colour distinctions in the U.S.S.R.

The South African spokesman granted that the position of the Indian in South Africa should be improved, but regretted that efforts to do so should be hindered by the uncompromising attitude taken up in India. They pointed out that this question could not be divorced from the whole colour complex in the Union. The Whites there were a minority, and history had imbued them with deep-rooted fears. Recently there had been significant developments in South African opinion, especially in the economic approach to racial problems.

Certain factors which complicated the Indian question there could not be ignored, for instance: (a) Their concentration in the province of Natal, where they were rapidly outstripping the whites in numbers. Other provinces were unlikely to increase their own difficulties by throwing open their borders to Natal Indians. (b) The keen economic competition of the Indian against which Europeans tended to protect their standards of life. (c) The marked changes in Natal Indian life, especially the rapid urbanisation within the last two decades.

As statements by the High Commissioner for India in South Africa showed, conditions there were not as black as had been painted; some progress was being achieved in the policy of "up-lift", and this had the support of much enlightened European opinion. A judicial Commission had recently been appointed to survey the scope for future improvements.

But the pace could not be forced by threats. India was incurring a grave responsibility by demanding immediate political equality, as this only aroused fears and retarded constructive solutions.

An Indian delegate complained that despite speeches by British statesmen against racial disabilities, the United Kingdom Government was unwilling to intervene in this dispute and took refuge behind the Statute of Westminster. He submitted that there should be some definite international or Commonwealth machinery to arbitrate in such matters. Another Indian delegate suggested that this should take the form of a tribunal of five members, who should be one representative from each of the two countries, one appointed by each from other Commonwealth countries, and a chairman selected by the other four members. Retaliation, he said, was not the proper method. In reply to this, a member from the United Kingdom stressed its deep desire to promote a settlement, because the dispute involved both the unity and the moral integrity of the Commonwealth. But, he said, just as Indian opinion rejected the idea that Great Britain should continue to protect minorities in India when it became independent, so also an outside tribunal would not be acceptable to South Africa. Nor would direct pressure from the United Kingdom ease the position, as previous experience regarding the Bantu had shown. It was correct to say that a more liberal outlook on racial questions was becoming apparent in South Africa, especially amongst young people, and this tendency held out some promise of better relations.

III. The Status of Indians elsewhere

Of a total of over three million Indians elsewhere in the Empire, two and a half million were in other Asiatic territories like Ceylon, Burma and Malaya. They were not brought under discussion, but according to one of the Indian papers, disputes with these territories before the war had been partly about conditions of labour, and partly, in the case of Burma and Ceylon, about political rights, concerning which acute differences of opinion had arisen. Regarding the treatment of nearly half a million Indians in Mauritius, Trinidad and British Guiana no complaint was made.

It was clear that the few thousand Indians in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom presented no problem. The position in Canada was felt to be less satisfactory, as here 1,600 Indians were concentrated in British Columbia where they had no provincial franchise. The result was that they had not gained Dominion franchise either, but a Canadian delegate stated that this might be remedied.

In the East African territories, which had some 80,000 Indians, there were various complaints about social and commercial discrimination, but the main cause of dissatisfaction was exclusion from the Kenya Highlands, which were reserved for white settlement.

IV. Indian Migration

Delegates of Australia, Canada and New Zealand indicated that their countries would not welcome large-scale Indian immigration, for reasons of economic standards and racial assimilation.

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An Indian member replied that India did not wish to regard herself as an emigration country (or as one Indian paper puts it "as a world emporium for unskilled labour"), and did not question the principle laid down by the Imperial War Cabinets of 1918 and 1917, to the effect that each Commonwealth country should enjoy complete control over the composition of its own population, by means of restriction of immigration. This should not mean, however, that British Indians should be more severely restricted than non-British Europeans. He suggested that each Dominion (except South Africa) should fix a small quota for Indian immigration, but this proposal was not favoured by delegates from the three Dominions concerned. Australian and Canadian spokesmen preferred a bilateral treaty, while a New Zealand member felt that that country should continue to deal with applications on their individual merits.

Although this aspect was not discussed, one of the Indian papers deals with the vexed question of emigration to countries like Burma, Malaya and Ceylon, whose whole economic structure, it was stated, depended largely upon a supply of Indian labour. India, it was stated, would continue to sanction this supply, but only on certain specified terms regarding conditions of labour, immigration of non-labour categories, and the status of Indians already settled there.

It was left to a United Kingdom delegate to point out that the Committee had neglected to discuss what he regarded as the most important issue before it. India's huge population was still increasing at the rate of five million a year. What outlets were going to be found to relieve this pressure? For lack of time this issue was not pursued further, but reference to the preparatory papers shows that Indian opinion is itself divided about the need for such outlets. The seriousness of the food problem is admitted, but while one writer foresees an adequate solution in the planned development of India herself, others regard large-scale emigration as essential. This movement, it is contended, should be directed chiefly towards those tropical regions of South and South-East Asia which are not well suited to white settlement, and it is recognised that China might have a similar interest in relieving her over-crowding. One paper would go further, and include the less favoured areas of Australia and New Zealand, East Africa and South Africa. It is clear that none of the present Dominions would be willing to accept this, but an Australian paper suggests that their attitude towards the problem cannot be a purely negative one. Nations like Australia should help to promote the agricultural and industrial development of the densely populated areas, by providing some of the necessary scientific and technical assistance.

It is evident that the unequal distribution of population is one of the fundamental disharmonies of the world. The challenge to small white nations with large territories might be dormant at present, but cannot be permanently ignored.

March 1st, 1945.

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London.S.W.1.

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